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Security Council

Sixty-first year

Provisional

5498th meeting

Sunday, 30 July 2006, 11.40 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. De La Sablière	(France)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. García Moritán
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Congo	Mr. Ikouebe
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	Ghana	Nana Effah-Apenteng
	Greece	Mr. Vassilakis
	Japan	Mr. Oshima
	Peru	Mr. Pereyra Plasencia
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Nasser
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Slovakia	Mr. Mlynár
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Manongi
	United States of America	Mr. Bolton

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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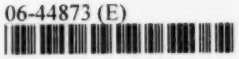

The meeting was called to order at 11.40 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in French*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Israel and Lebanon, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Gillerman (Israel) and Mr. Mahmoud (Lebanon) took seats at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in French*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

I should like to draw the attention of the members of the Council to photocopies of a letter dated 29 July 2006 from the Secretary-General, which will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/2006/595.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency, Mr. Kofi Annan.

The Secretary-General: Let me thank you, Mr. President, for arranging this meeting on very short notice.

We meet at a moment of extreme gravity, first and foremost for the people of the Middle East, but also for the authority of this Organization, and especially the Security Council. As the Council is aware, during the night the Israeli air force bombed the village of Qana, in southern Lebanon. That village is no longer in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). We therefore had no United Nations personnel nearby at the time of the attack, although Chinese engineers and two medical teams have now managed to reach the area. They are helping to clear the rubble and are giving treatment to survivors. I am therefore relying on the Lebanese authorities for my information. Preliminary reports say that at least 54 people have been killed, among them at least 37 children.

We must condemn this action in the strongest possible terms, and I appeal to the Council to do likewise.

I am deeply dismayed that my earlier calls for the immediate cessation of hostilities were not heeded, with the result that innocent life continues to be taken and innocent civilians continue to suffer. I repeat that call once again from the Council Chamber, and I appeal to the Council to do likewise. I send my deepest condolences to the families of all the victims of violence — in Lebanon, in Israel and in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Gaza.

This tragedy has rightly provoked moral outrage throughout the world. Regrettably, some Lebanese people have turned their anger against the Organization. Earlier today a large number of protesters broke into our headquarters in Beirut and briefly set it afire. I am glad to say that the fire was quickly put out. As of now, three staff members have been reported injured — and, I am glad to say, none critically. The demonstrators have now left the building, after intervention by the Lebanese armed forces. I am deeply grateful to the Government of Lebanon for that prompt action, as well as to the Speaker of the Lebanese parliament, Mr. Nabih Berri, and other Lebanese leaders whose statesmanlike appeals for calm were decisive.

The United Nations House is the hub of our humanitarian activities in Lebanon, which will continue throughout the country. But, naturally, we fear similar reactions elsewhere in the region or in the wider Islamic world. I appeal to the authorities and people in all countries to respect and ensure the safety of United Nations personnel. I appeal to everyone to understand that we are doing our best to help, through diplomacy, humanitarian action and through the efforts of UNIFIL, which, as all are aware, suffered tragic losses only a few days ago.

The tragic events in Qana remind us that 10 years ago over 100 people who had taken refuge in that same village suffered a similar fate. We must deliver the region from this seemingly endless cycle of violence.

In the last 18 days several hundred Lebanese citizens have been killed, the vast majority of them civilians and at least a third of them children. During the same period hundreds of thousands of Lebanese have had to flee their homes, many of them under heavy shelling. Meanwhile, over 50 Israelis have died, including 19 civilians; and the population of northern Israel has been subjected to intense and continuous rocket fire. Thousands are now in shelters. It is important to stress that both sides in this conflict bear a heavy responsibility, and there is strong prima facie evidence that both have committed grave breaches of international humanitarian law.

The present fighting began on 12 July with an unprovoked Hizbollah attack on Israel and the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers. Since then, Hizbollah has continued firing rockets indiscriminately into northern Israel from positions apparently located in the midst of civilian populations. No one disputes Israel's right to defend itself, but by its manner of doing so it has caused, and is causing, death and suffering on a wholly unacceptable scale.

As the Council is aware, I have repeatedly condemned all actions that target civilians. The High Commissioner for Human Rights has reminded all parties that they may be held accountable for any breaches of international humanitarian law. But the most urgent need is to bring the fighting to a halt without further delay. For that, the Council has a solemn responsibility. Action is needed now, before many more children, women and men become casualties of a conflict over which they have no control. I therefore reiterate my call for an immediate cessation of hostilities, to allow desperately needed humanitarian relief to reach the victims.

While that is happening, we can work together on the political framework needed for a lasting ceasefire and a sustainable solution, the strengthening of Lebanon's Government, the disarming of all militia and the implementation of all Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006). I will work with the Council on the development and deployment of a stabilization force to support the Government of Lebanon in its decision and responsibility to extend its authority throughout the country.

I know there are differences among Council members about the precise sequence of actions needed. I beg them to set those differences aside and come together on the most urgent point: the immediate cessation of hostilities.

I should also share with the Council that, this morning in my conversation with Prime Minister Siniora of Lebanon, he told me his Government had taken a decision that it would no longer engage in further diplomatic discussions and efforts to find a solution without a ceasefire. I asked him whether the Government as a whole had taken that decision, and he reaffirmed that it was the decision of his Government.

The other information that I would like to share with the Council is that UNIFIL did receive a request from the Israel Defense Forces for the population of two villages — Ramyah and Ayta al-Shab — to be evacuated before sunset today. Of course, UNIFIL has refused to evacuate the villages, indicating that it does not have the capacity to do so. These requests have often come, where their assistance is required, from the Government of Lebanon. That is something I thought members should know, to let them understand the dynamics in the region and in the south.

Let me conclude by stating very clearly and briefly that the authority and standing of the Security Council are at stake. The authority and standing of the Council are at stake: people have noticed its failure to act firmly and quickly during this crisis. Today's events at the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) were in part an expression of that frustration.

For the sake of the people of the region and of the Organization, I urge the Council to act, and to act now.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Mahmoud (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): We thank you, Mr. President, for quickly convening the Security Council this morning. We thank the Secretary-General for his renewed appeal for an immediate ceasefire and his call on the Security Council to take a position on the current situation.

We meet today as innocent blood continues to be shed, as we hear mothers cry, awaiting the burial of the children-victims of Qana. We have come to ask, "When will the killing machine stop?" This week is the third

in which acts of killing and destruction have continued. Now, the hamlet of Qana once again meets its fate with Israel, 10 years on — Qana, that peaceful, quiet hamlet, where children, women and old people sought refuge, attempting to keep their spark of life alive in the darkness of the shelters.

Israel's shells do not recognize the innocence of children or the sanctity of life. Rescue workers have pulled more than 60 corpses from under a residential building. More corpses continue to be pulled from the ruins, mostly women and children, and thus the final number of victims of the latest Israeli massacre has yet to be tallied. Undoubtedly, in their conscience, in their deepest heart of human hearts, the members of the Council all know that Israel is committing war massacres. Israel is committing atrocities against humanity. The regrettable fact that such massacres have yet to be addressed by resolutions of the Security Council does not mean that the truth is to remain hidden.

This tragedy came at a time when the Government of Lebanon, in consultation with friendly States, was seeking a window to resolve the crisis raging in Lebanon. The Prime Minister of Lebanon, Fouad Siniora, on behalf of the united Lebanese Government, set forth Lebanon's understanding of the seven-point plan, beginning with an immediate comprehensive ceasefire. However, it seems that Israel has other solutions: solutions of shells and aircraft bombing children; solutions of siege preventing medication and food from reaching civilians in their villages; solutions of collective punishment and collective killing; and challenging the will of the overwhelming majority of the countries of Council members, and all countries of the world, calling for an immediate ceasefire.

Now, after the massacre — after many massacres, after the second Qana massacre — in respect for the dignity and the will of the Lebanese people, in memory of the martyrs who fell today and who have fallen during the past three weeks, we believe that it is neither viable nor acceptable to consider solutions before an immediate comprehensive ceasefire.

The Lebanese people who demonstrated in the streets and squares of Beirut last year, who called for truth, independence and freedom — the Lebanese people that the Council supported in its many resolutions, whose democracy and vitality the Council proclaimed and welcomed — are today, with one voice, mourning their martyrs. Together with their Government, they are calling upon the Council to bring and end to the firing immediately, without delay, and to undertake an effective and serious investigation of this massacre and of the massacres that Israel has perpetrated on the land of Lebanon over the past three weeks.

We are committed to the United Nations. We believe it to be a haven for the weak and the victims of injustice, more than a podium for the strong. Will we find in the Security Council what the wounded Lebanese people seek?

The Lebanese Government, through its Prime Minister, has addressed the diplomatic corps. I will now read out the Prime Minister's statement.

(*spoke in English*)

> "I shall be brief. This is the time for action, not talk. With the backing and support of the entire nation, we have left no stone unturned and no avenue unexplored in our sincere desire for a rapid and comprehensive ceasefire and an end to the lethal rampage and carnage carried out by the Israeli army over the past 18 days in their systematic determination to destroy Lebanon. We were confident that the seven-point plan I proposed at the Rome Conference would be supported by all peace-loving Nations.
>
> "Instead, the Israeli response has been yet another massacre of innocent women and children in the town of Qana, which suffered a similar human tragedy 10 years ago, when Israel cold-bloodedly murdered more than 100 civilians who had taken refuge at the United Nations outpost there. They called it 'Grapes of Wrath'. What principle of warfare will they invoke this time? Why, we wonder, did they choose Qana yet again? Perhaps this time we should call it 'Grapes of Hatred'.
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> "We can only reassert that there is no place on this sad day for any discussion, other than our call for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire and withdrawal to behind the Blue Line, as well as an international investigation, without delay, into the continuing Israeli massacres in Lebanon in violation of international laws and conventions and basic human decency. We cannot be expected

to negotiate or discuss anything else while the ruthless, pitiless sword of the Israeli war machine continues to drip with the blood of innocent women and children.

"I also ask you — and this is why I called you here today — to urge your Governments, especially those who are members of the Security Council, to back our request for an immediate meeting of the Security Council and our call for an unconditional ceasefire.

"Finally, I would like to assure you that, while we can understand the anger being expressed during the spontaneous demonstration at United Nations House that you have been witnessing on your televisions, we deplore the attacks against the building and ask the demonstrators to express themselves peacefully. United Nations House is a house for all Lebanese.

"Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I know that, deep within you, in your heart of hearts, you know that Israel is committing atrocities on a scale that your conscience cannot tolerate. So do pass on the truth — the whole, unadulterated truth — to your Governments and organizations and urge them to move swiftly to ensure an immediate, unconditional ceasefire and withdrawal to the Blue Line and to back our call for an immediate meeting of the Security Council."

(*spoke in Arabic*)

I express the hope that Security Council members will support Lebanon's call for an urgent Council meeting and the call for an immediate ceasefire and for an immediate investigation into the massacres perpetrated in Lebanon by Israel.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now call on the representative of Israel.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): I thank the Secretary-General for honouring us with his presence.

This is a horrible, sad and bloody Sunday. This is a day on which we mourn and grieve, together with the people of Lebanon, at the deaths of the innocents and civilians in Kafr Qana. Those people, including women and children, who were killed in this horrible, tragic incident may have been killed by Israeli fire, but they are the victims of Hizbollah: they are the victims of terror. If there were no Hizbollah, this would never have happened. If Lebanon were free of the stranglehold of that monster, this would never have happened. And, while we mourn the deaths of those people, we must stress that Israel has never targeted — and in this particular case did not target — innocent people.

Kafr Qana has been a hub for Hizbollah for a long time. Hizbollah has been launching missiles and rockets at Israel from Kafr Qana. We will make available to the Security Council a film that shows Hizbollah launching a rocket from right behind a three-storey house: a civilian residence very similar to the one that was hit today in Kafr Qana. That is the sad reality.

Israel has repeatedly beseeched the residents of Qana to leave. I would not be surprised if Hizbollah made them stay. We are dealing with a ruthless, cynical, cruel enemy, one of the most monstrous terror organizations that this world has ever known. They have no regard for Israeli life, and they have no regard for Lebanese life. They do not care about the people of Lebanon. They have infiltrated every fibre and every cell of that country, so that, in the words of my esteemed Lebanese colleague who appeared on United States television only last week, "You cannot distinguish in Lebanon between Hizbollah and the Lebanese." In his words, Hizbollah is everywhere; in his words, Hizbollah has infiltrated and become part of Lebanese society.

But there is a huge moral disequivalence between the two sides. While our enemies — who only today have launched more than 100 missiles at Israeli towns and villages — specifically target women and children in order to kill them, we are defending ourselves in this brutal war. And sometimes, tragically, as happened today, women and children get hurt, because they are used as human shields by Hizbollah. Hizbollah has homes in Lebanon that house missiles — in which the family sleeps with a missile. When you sleep with a missile, sometimes you do not wake up in the morning. In Israel, we have homes that are equipped with air raid shelters to save people from bombs; in Lebanon, they have homes that they equip to launch missiles, taking into account that those people could be killed.

Today, we say that we are truly sorry for the people of Lebanon and for the people who were killed. I have never heard Hizbollah say that they are sorry for

a single Israeli — woman, child, elderly person, civilian or innocent — who has been killed. Never. Why? Because they target us specifically. That is their declared aim, and that is what we are fighting. And while for us every dead Lebanese child is a horrible mistake and a tragedy, for them every dead Israeli child is a victory and a cause for celebration.

I am saying emphatically at this table that I would not be surprised, because of their cynicism and brutality and total disregard for human life, if this is exactly what Hizbollah wanted to happen. I would not be surprised if this is something that they wanted and wished for precisely today, the day when Secretary Rice is in the region trying to reach a settlement. Because members of the Council know better than I that on any given day when we are so close to reaching a settlement, the terrorists, the extremists, the fundamentalists snatch it away from us, because they do not want a settlement.

And I must say that I feel that what is happening around this table today is exactly what they wanted to happen. Today, while there is mourning in Israel and in many other places around the world, there may very well be jubilation in Tehran, in Damascus and in the Hizbollah strongholds, because this is exactly what they want to happen. They want the Council to be called up to arms and to seize the fire. They want it to do exactly what it is being asked to do today. They want the Council to react the way in which it does.

I know that these are harsh words, but I believe them with all my heart. I beseech members not to play into their hands, not to provide them with what they seek while they sacrifice their own people as human shields and as victims.

And today, of all days, I would like to ask my Lebanese friend: tell your people, the brave people of Lebanon, the Government that you represent and your brave Prime Minister, for whom we have a lot of respect, that the demonstrations held today in Beirut should not be against the United Nations; they should be against Hizbollah. Hizbollah is the one that has caused you all this pain. Hizbollah is the monster that you have allowed to grow. If you had taken care of it before, if you had deployed your forces in the south, this would never have happened. And if the Security Council had enforced resolution 1559 (2004), this would never have happened. Tell your people to demonstrate not for blood, but for peace and for hope.

If we want to live together in this tough neighbourhood and in this blood-ridden region, we need to create a culture of hope rather than a culture of violence. We need to create a culture in which the children who were hurt in Qana would have been at school today rather than huddled together as hostages for Hizbollah — a culture in which the children of Qiryat Shemona would have gone to school today instead of being scared and huddling in bomb shelters because of Katyusha rockets. We need to change the culture of hatred. We need to teach our children about hope. And we should not let what happened today — tragic and horrible as it is — change the facts and the truth. And that is that Hizbollah must be totally disarmed. Otherwise, if there is a ceasefire today and if Hizbollah remains with its capabilities and its huge arsenal of arms, it will raise its ugly head again. And it will rise not just against us and against the people of Lebanon, but against the whole region and civilization as we know it. Do not let Iran and Tehran, the sponsors of Hizbollah, have their day. Make it clear that this must end — not that hostilities and fire must end, but that terror and Hizbollah must end, because until they do, there will be hostilities and there will be fire, and more innocents will pay the price.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Mahmoud (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): I apologize for taking the floor a second time.

What good is it to try to deflect attention from the real massacre, its causes and the source of the fire? The Lebanese Government has from day one been calling for a ceasefire. Only an immediate ceasefire will give civilians from both sides of the border a chance to be saved from what has been taking place. Even the humanitarian truce suggested by the Secretary-General before the weekend was rejected.

It has been clear from the very beginning that it was not Hizbollah that was the target. It was Lebanon that was the target. Infrastructure was targeted and hundreds of civilians were killed before Israel even took up any campaign against Hizbollah and its positions.

The Prime Minister has emphatically denied the allegation that rockets were fired from near the area that was bombed. In Ramyah and Ayta al-Shab, civilians will attempt to go to sleep tonight in fear of Israeli action, after their warning. There is the potential

for a new catastrophe in southern Lebanon if a ceasefire is not declared.

The President (*spoke in French*): There are no more speakers inscribed on my list.

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

In accordance with the understanding reached earlier, I should now like to invite Council members to informal consultations following the adjournment of this meeting.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.